Note: Additional rare species have been reported, but these have not been reverified.

SITE DESCRIPTION: This site contains a superlative natural area with many exemplary plant communities and rare species. Sandy beaches, dune grasslands, live oak (Quercus virginiana) scrub, mature upland forest, bald cypress (Taxodium distichum) swamps, evergreen bay swamps, and interdunal ponds provide a variety of habitats for rare and unusual species, most of which are at or near their northern range limits here. Campsites, beaches, a nature center, and an extensive trail system afford many and varied recreational opportunities. The flora, fauna, and natural vegetation have been very well documented as a result of recent biological inventories.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION: The conservation planning boundary coincides with the State Park boundary. This is justified because the state park is surrounded by developed or intensively utilized land.

THREATS: Expansion of recreational facilities would likely degrade the remaining coastal dune grassland and live oak thicket. Another threat is dune stabilization. In its original state, Cape Henry was an integrated landscape unit that was shaped by continuous dune formation. Presently, seaside roads and buildings, particularly at Fort Story Military Reservation, have all but halted the natural growth and spread of dunes, resulting in the rapid succession to woody vegetation. Species demanding open sandy habitats are therefore at risk because these habitats are not being replenished.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS: Successful management of the natural heritage resources here will rely upon careful monitoring of species population status and studies of habitat utilization. The on-going study of the eastern chicken turtle (Deirochelys reticularia) is exemplary in this regard. The study showed that this rare turtle depends upon a variety of habitats at Seashore State Park. The feeding, nesting, and over-wintering habitats must each be protected.

Monitoring programs for some of the more sensitive plants should be initiated. For instance, pennywort (Hydrocotyle bonariensis), may or may not be vulnerable to camp ground disturbance. Is the plant there because of the disturbance, or in spite of the disturbance? What should be done to enhance this population?

CURRENT STATUS: The site is publicly owned; most of the area is managed as a natural area within a registered National Natural Landmark.

PROTECTION RECOMMENDATIONS: The current balance between recreational use and natural area protection should be maintained. General management/protection recommendations from Clampitt et al. (1992) include; 1) protect groundwater quality and hydrology, 2) direct and control human access and use to minimize environmental disruption, 3) control exotic species, 4) monitor and manage natural heritage resources, and 5) continue research efforts.